



Cooking
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Senior food editor



Nutrition
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Nutrition editor



Fitness
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Fitness editor



Motivation
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Weight Watchers
Leader and personal
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ask the *panel*

A one-stop shop for fitness, nutrition, motivation and cooking questions. You ask, our expert team answers.

Q I've been trying to lose weight without success for more than a year and can't seem to shake the constant fear of failure. Any suggestions?
Irene Newton, Brisbane, Qld

Luana Bortoli replies

A When I stopped using the phrase "I can't" as an excuse for everything and redirected the energy from my fear of failing into weight loss and exercise, I was pleasantly surprised at what I could do.

Being overweight and inactive was no longer an option for me. From my first spin class to when I could run 20 minutes non-stop, I knew that keeping fit and healthy was going to be something I'd do for good.

As I got over my fears and started to lose weight (a total of 40kg), I made the decision to become a personal trainer because I knew what being overweight with low self-esteem felt like.

Even now I still have challenges: despite having been a group fitness instructor for seven years, I still get butterflies when my classes are full. And I recently completed a four-week beach boot camp that meant getting up early and having a tough, but rewarding workout three mornings a week.

Life in the healthy lane – it doesn't get any better. And all it takes to get up to speed is simply saying that *you can*.



Q There seems to be so many different methods of cooking rice and mine always turns out gluggy. Can you recommend a simple way to get it right?
Caroline Jenkins, Randwick, NSW

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Lucy Kelly replies

A Cooking rice perfectly can be a challenge and you're right, there are many different ways such as absorption, in the microwave, boiling, baking and in a rice cooker.

For an easy way to produce great rice every time, use an electric rice cooker. You can get one from department and appliance stores. It takes the guess work out of cooking rice and another huge plus is you can turn it on and forget about it.

But it doesn't hurt to be able to cook rice another way. I use the absorption method. To cook one cup of white rice, measure it into a sieve and rinse under cold running water until the water runs clear. Tip the rice into a saucepan and add 1½ cups of cold water. Bring to the boil then reduce the heat to very low and cover with a lid. Simmer on very gentle heat for 12 minutes. Don't be tempted to peek inside! After 12 minutes, remove your saucepan from the heat and stand with the lid on for 10 minutes. Remove the lid and fluff up with a fork and serve, or you can simply put the lid back on – it'll stay warm for about 20 minutes.

If you're cooking brown rice, add a ½ cup of water and cook for 30 minutes instead of 12. Soaking brown rice prior to cooking reduces both the time it takes and the water required.

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Write to Lucy at *Ask the Panel*, Locked Bag 2020, Broadway, NSW 2007, Australia or email editor@weightwatchers.com.au

ask the panel

Q I work a busy job and don't always have time to follow recipes when making dinner. Is there an easy way to ensure my meals are balanced and healthy?

Jodie Warren, Hobart, Tas

Emma Stirling replies

A Congratulations on being an intuitive and creative cook. There's no need to follow a rigid recipe every time you plan an evening meal, but it does pay to have some nutrition principles in mind to keep the healthy balance.

Decide on your main protein ingredient first, such as fish, skinless chicken, lamb fillet or lean beef stir-fry strips. Alternatively, go for a vegetarian option like tofu or canned chickpeas. A lean source of protein helps provide maximum appetite satisfaction along with essential nutrients such as iron and zinc.

Next, decide on a grain-based or carbohydrate-containing component, such as couscous, brown rice, pasta, tortilla wraps or a starchy vegetable like sweet potato. Nutritious carbohydrates, with the emphasis on wholegrain varieties, provide glucose to fuel your brain and working muscles. It's a myth that you need to cut carbs out of evening meals, but you don't need massive quantities unless you're running 20km after dinner. Go for controlled carb portions like a cup of cooked rice or pasta per person.

Then, fill your dish with a vibrant array of vegetables. Go for as many different types as you can. One simple strategy is buying a large selection of vegetables in small quantities like a tiny wedge of red cabbage, a handful of snow peas, a bunch of choy sum, two yellow squash and so on. This way you can turn your standard stir-fry or salad into a 10 vegetable antioxidant and fibre boost instead of one with only three vegies such as carrot, snow peas and broccoli.

Finally, add flavour without fat and salt by skipping the cream and butter in favour of ingredients like pungent herbs, aromatic spices and lemon juice. Your new creation will be heavy on taste, but light on kilojoules. And you can include it as part of your healthy-weight and recipe repertoire.

Q I haven't been able to get back into exercise since I had my baby – I just can't seem to fit it in. Have you got any tips or advice for baby-friendly exercise options?

Kerry Arrastia, Frenchs Forest, NSW

Martha Lourey-Bird replies

A Fitting regular exercise in post-baby can be tricky. Remember to take it easy at first, then, once you've had your six-week check-up and all-clear from the doctor, gradually pick up the pace and start incorporating more activity options.

However, when you start exercising – specifically if you're continuing to breastfeed – make sure you get adequate rest, food and fluids. And, for the sake of comfort and regular milk supply, it's usually best to exercise after, rather than just before, feeding.

Some baby-friendly exercise ideas include:

- Invest in an all-terrain three-wheel pram with tyre wheels so you can get out and enjoy daily walks.
- Try different parks or walking tracks and use your exercise time to expose your baby to a range of different sights, smells and environments.
- If the weather isn't ideal or the terrain around your local area is too rough, walk around a mall, window shopping with your baby in a front-pack.
- Get together once a week with a group of mums, put the babies in their prams and go for a brisk walk and talk rather than having coffee and cake.
- Collect some exercise DVDs for times when it's difficult to get out of the house and do a workout at home.
- Invest in an exercise bike to ride in the comfort of your own home while your baby is sleeping.
- Try a post-natal yoga or group exercise class where your baby is welcome to join you.
- Visit a gym with a crèche or ask your partner/friend/relative to babysit so you can escape the house and go to a structured exercise class once a week.



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